

# CRITICAL INCIDENT STRESS INFORMATION SHEETS

You have experienced a traumatic event or a critical incident (any event that causes unusually strong emotional reactions that have the potential to interfere with the ability to function normally). Even though the event may be over, you may now be experiencing or may experience later, some strong physical or emotional reactions. It is very common, in fact, quite *normal*, for people to experience emotional aftershocks when they have passed through a horrible event.

Sometimes the emotional aftershocks (or stress reaction) appear immediately after the traumatic event. Sometimes they appear a few hours or a few days later. And, in some cases, weeks or months may pass before the stress reactions appear.

The signs and symptoms of a stress reaction may last a few days, a few weeks, a few months, or longer depending on the severity of the traumatic event. The understanding and the support of friends and loved ones usually cause the stress reactions to pass more quickly. Occasionally, the traumatic event is so painful that professional assistance may be necessary. This does not imply craziness or weakness. It simply indicates that the particular traumatic event was just too powerful for the person to manage by himself or herself.

Here are some common signs and signals of a stress reaction:

## ***Physical\****

chills  
thirst  
fatigue  
nausea  
fainting  
twitches  
vomiting  
dizziness  
weakness  
chest pain  
headaches  
elevated bp  
rapid heart rate  
muscle tremors  
shock symptoms  
grinding of teeth  
visual difficulties  
profuse sweating  
difficulty breathing  
etc...

## ***Cognitive***

confusion  
nightmares  
uncertainty  
hypervigilance  
suspiciousness  
intrusive images  
blaming someone  
poor problem solving  
poor attention or  
decision making  
poor concentration or  
memory  
disorientation of  
time, place or  
person  
difficulty identifying  
objects or people  
heightened or  
lowered alertness  
increased or  
decreased  
awareness of  
surroundings  
etc...

## ***Emotional***

fear  
guilt  
grief  
panic  
denial  
anxiety  
agitation  
irritability  
depression  
intense anger  
apprehension  
emotional shock  
emotional outbursts  
feeling overwhelmed  
loss of emotional  
control  
inappropriate  
emotional response  
etc...

## ***Behavioral***

withdrawal  
antisocial acts  
inability to rest  
intensified pacing  
erratic movements  
change in social  
activity  
change in speech  
patterns  
loss or increase of  
appetite  
hyperalert to  
environment  
increased alcohol  
consumption  
change in usual  
communications  
etc...

## ***Spiritual***

anger at God  
withdrawal from  
faith-based  
community  
feeling abandoned by  
god  
finding it hard to  
pray  
no yearning for  
righteousness  
no spirit of  
thankfulness  
no feelings of hope  
seeing no value in  
scripture  
crisis of faith: when  
your normal,  
established  
relationship with  
god and  
accompanying  
theological "world-  
views" seem  
violated  
etc...

***\*Any of these symptoms may indicate the need for medical evaluation. When in doubt, contact a physician.***

## **THINGS TO TRY:**

- Within the first 24-48 hours be sure to include periods of appropriate physical exercise, alternated with relaxation will alleviate some of the physical reactions.
- Structure your time -- keep busy.
- You're normal and having normal reactions to an abnormal event. Don't label yourself crazy.
- Talk to people; talk is the most healing medicine.
- Be aware of *numbing* the pain with overuse of drugs or alcohol. You don't need to complicate this with a substance abuse problem.
- Reach out; people do care.
- Maintain as normal a schedule as possible.
- Spend time with others.
- Help your co-workers as much as possible by sharing feelings and checking out how they're doing.
- Give yourself permission to feel rotten and share your feeling with others.
- Keep a journal, write your way through those sleepless hours.
- Do things that feel good to you.
- Realize that those around you are under stress.
- Don't make any big life changes.
- Do make as many daily decisions as possible which will give you a feeling of control over your life, i.e., if someone asks you what you want to eat--answer them even if you're not sure.
- Get plenty of rest.
- Don't try to fight recurring thoughts, dreams, or flashbacks - they are normal and will decrease over time and become less painful.
- Eat well-balanced and regular meals (even if you don't feel like it).

## **FOR FAMILY MEMBERS AND FRIENDS:**

- Listen carefully.
- Spend time with the traumatized person.
- Offer your assistance and a listening ear even if they have not asked for help.
- Reassure them that they are safe.
- Help them with everyday tasks like cleaning, cooking, caring for the family, minding children.
- Give them some private time.
- Don't take their anger or other feelings personally.
- Don't tell them that they are "lucky it wasn't worse;" those statements do not console a traumatized person. Instead, tell them you're sorry such an event has occurred and that you want to understand and assist them.

If for any reason you think you need some additional assistance with any of the things mentioned here, please call the following number for help: